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Oscars SciTech Awards Hit by Visual Effects Credit Dispute (Exclusive)

Steve Perlman, CEO of Rearden Mova, claims in a letter to the Academy that the facial performance capture system's core developers are not being recognized.

BY CAROLYN GIARDINA FEBRUARY 6, 2015 11:01AM



'Guardians of the Galaxy' COURTESY OF MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT



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United States District Court
Northern District of California

PLAINTIFFS' EXHIBIT

7

Case No. 4:17-cv-4006-JST

Date Entered _____

By _____

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The company behind a visual effects system used in *Guardians of the Galaxy* and other films is challenging an Academy Award being handed out Saturday to a man it claims is taking improper credit.

The president and CEO of Rearden Mova — a company behind a facial performance capture system that's being honored at the Academy's annual Scientific and Technical Awards — has sent a letter of appeal to the group's Science and Technology Council, arguing that the "core members of its R&D team responsible for essential inventions or major contributions," including himself, are not being recognized. He is requesting a new review.



Technical Achievement Awards (an Academy certificate) are set to be presented during the SciTech ceremony to **Tim Cotter, Roger van der Laan, Ken Pearce** and **Greg LaSalle** for "the innovative design and development of the MOVA facial performance capture system."

But while agreeing with the selection of three of the four names, Rearden Mova's leader, **Steve Perlman**, contends that LaSalle, who is now working with the MOVA system at VFX house Digital Domain, was "not even on the R&D team ... [and] made no essential inventions or major contributions to its development."

He added in the letter, a copy of which was obtained by *The Hollywood Reporter*: "It is horrifying to see a decade of my life's work credited to someone who was no more than a trainee of the end result."

Compounding the situation is a bitter disagreement over licensing of the technology, as Perlman makes a related claim that LaSalle and Digital Domain used MOVA technology for Marvel's megahit film *Guardians of the Galaxy*, but "I never granted Digital Domain a license."

A spokesperson for Digital Domain and LaSalle tells *THR*: "We are confident we have the proper license to operate this technology." The spokesperson would not elaborate further. LaSalle could not be reached for comment at press time.

Perlman asserted in the letter: "I invented and/or co-invented all of the core technologies, and I integrated together the inventions into a practical and high-quality service offering. I also personally wrote every single Mova patent, documented what contribution, large or small, each co-inventor made to each patent, and I have personally maintained every Mova patent worldwide to this day, all of which are assigned to my company, Rearden Mova." He claimed his contributions were scientific, including the application of the principles of psychophysics.



In response, an Academy spokesperson says: "Mr. Perlman's work as founder of MOVA has been key. However, in this case, the Academy determined that his contribution was not of a technical or scientific nature and therefore not eligible for awards consideration." The Academy's decision comes as several owners and/or founders of their companies are set to receive SciTech Awards at this year's ceremony.

Mova debuted in 2006 at the annual CG confab Siggraph, and it quickly drew attention when it was revealed that Digital Domain and director **David Fincher** were already testing the facial capture system to create a CG version of **Brad Pitt** for *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Mova was used for that film, which went on to win an Oscar in visual effects.

Perlman claimed that in reviewing the Mova award application, the SciTech Awards committee didn't follow the rules in that it didn't consider all the materials that he provided. He also contended that there was a Digital Domain employee involved in the SciTech Award review, which he felt was a conflict of interest. LaSalle is set to speak at the ceremony on Saturday when the team accepts the award.

In the letter to the SciTech Council, Perlman submitted materials that included an email from LaSalle dated May 18, 2006, saying, "In preparation of things to come, over the next month, I'd like to learn as much as I can about the capture and calibration process. I'd like to start next week with the makeup prep and application, then during future shoots learn about setting up the system and preparing it for a shoot." This email was addressed to another member of the Mova team, **John Speck**.



Explained Perlman in the letter: "The reason LaSalle had no experience working with Mova Contour (not even the rudimentary basics of makeup prep and application) on the eve of its debut was because he wasn't a member of the Mova Contour R&D team. John Speck and I, together with the other members of the R&D team, had worked for years inventing and refining the core technologies. ... Yet Speck and I were denied an Academy Award for our breakthrough work."

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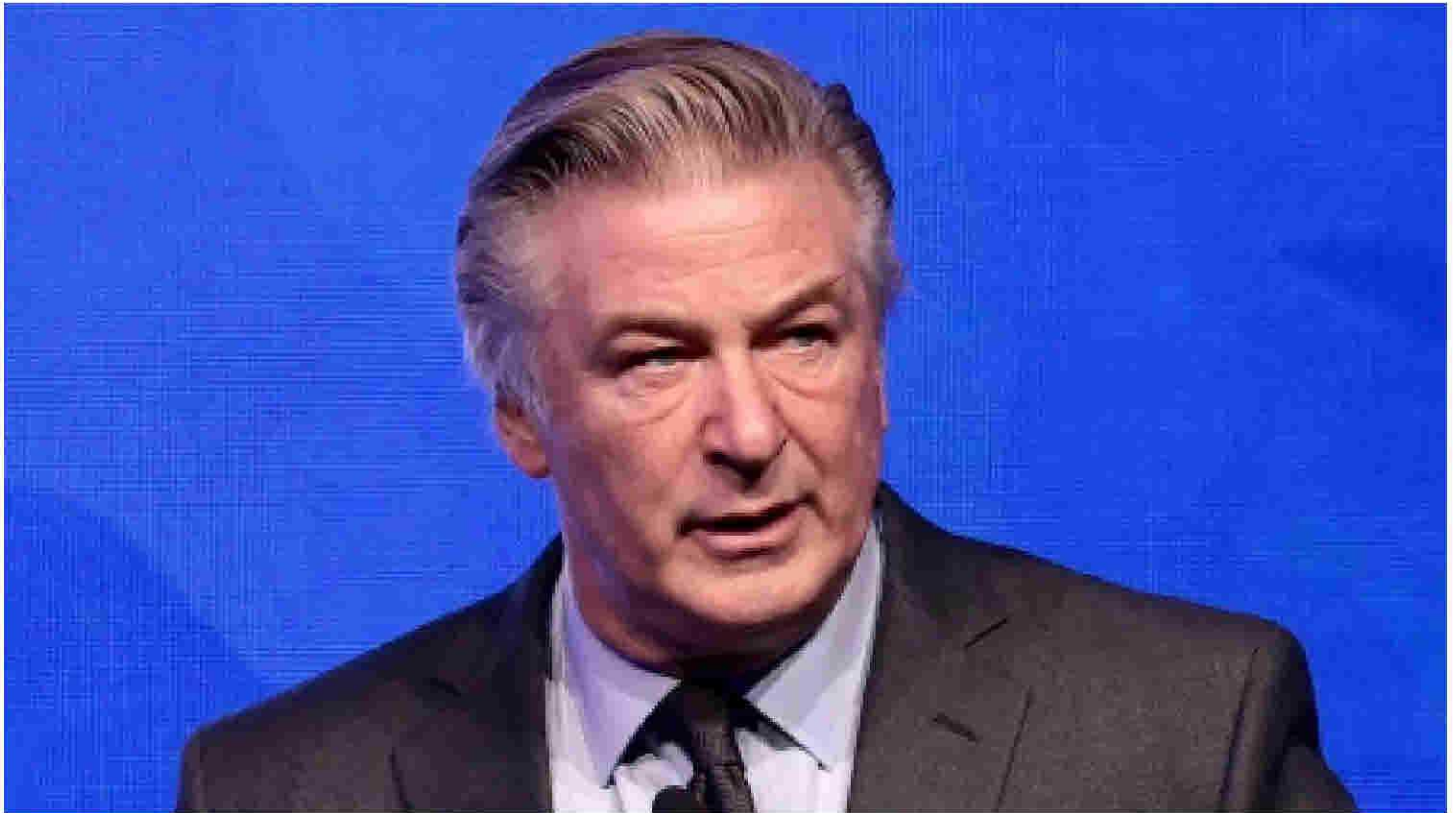
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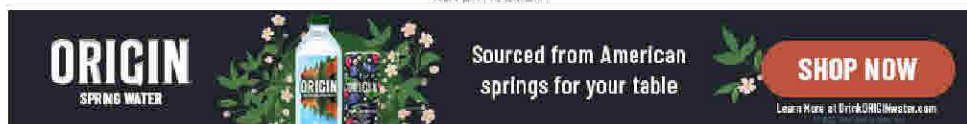
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